

Program will help Willow School kindergarteners learn to ride a bike

BY MARILYN THOMAS
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GoodSpeed Cycles thinks everyone should have a chance to ride a bike, so it has teamed up with Homewood's Willow School to teach kindergarteners the essentials.

Learning to ride is learning to balance, so the shiny Strider bikes that stand just two feet tall don't have pedals. Kids start by walking and then start pushing with their feet.

"They're more like a scooter, until you put the pedals on, which can be done with one bolt," said Steve Buchtel of GoodSpeed.

In fall, Willow will offer an after-school program to teach 5-year-olds how to ride, offering plenty of safety tips in the process. Over time, the program will become part of Willow's gym classes.

A fundraising effort to support the program has been extended to May 30. The initial drive raised \$5,000 in three days through donations and a matching one-to-one grant from GoodSpeed. That purchased 24 Strider bikes, helmets and an instruction

program through the All Kids Bike organization, Buchtel said. To be able to demonstrate for the students, the teacher gets an adult-size bike.

Each additional \$185 raised will get another bike and helmet for the program. The National Council of Jewish Women-South Cook already has pledged \$1,000 toward a second round. Willow School is expecting about 200 kindergarteners next year. Buchtel said the more bikes they can purchase means giving more students a chance to learn to ride without waiting around for a turn on a bike.

Donations can be made online at <https://support.allkidsbike.org> or send a check payable to GoodSpeed Cycles at 2125 183rd St. Homewood, IL 60430.

Graham Bolkema, owner of GoodSpeed, learned about the All Kids Bike Kindergarten PE Program, and he and General Manager Josh Klein thought it would be a great program for Homewood kids.

Buchtel said then former District 153 Superintendent Dale Mitchell, himself a cyclist, was enthusiastic about the program, but after that con-

versation in early 2020, planning was sidelined when schools shut down in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

About 18 months later, Buchtel met with Superintendent Scott McAlister who encouraged him to meet with Willow School Principal Melissa Lawson and physical education teacher Jodi Klyn. That's when things started to move along.

"It's thrilling that they are as excited about it as we are," he said.

GoodSpeed agreed to work on the fundraising aspect. The logistics of where to store the bikes and how to conduct the training are the major issues, but GoodSpeed will be storing the bikes for now, and Buchtel said the All Kids Bike program comes with a manual for teachers to follow, and five years of follow-up support.

"Growing up in Homewood from next fall forward means you're going to know how to ride a bike and that is something you don't forget how to do," Buchtel said. "You may not always have access to a bike, but you'll have access to the opportunity to do it."



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Josh Klein, left, and Graham Bolkema of GoodSpeed Cycles, organized a fundraising effort to purchase the little Strider bikes for a Willow School bike riding program.



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